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SUBJECT: NINEWA: ADM REPORTS CONTINUED MARGINALIZATION OF
CHRISTIANS

REF: MOSUL 00048

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader James Knight. Reasons: 1.4(b) and (d).
This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) PRT Team Leader Knight and IPAO Pope met Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) Mosul Director and Provincial Council Representative Gevara Zia and ADM Deputy Director for Mosul Toma Khowshaba at PRT offices on FOB Marez (Mosul) 12 August 2006. Zia and Khowshaba complain that Christians and other minorities in Ninewa continue to be marginalized by Arabs and Kurds. They insist that Ninewa's Chaldo-Assyrian community was victimized by Kurdish intimidation and vote rigging in the January 2005 provincial elections, denying ADM three Ninewa Provincial Council seats they would otherwise hold.

¶2. (C) Sectarian attacks by Arabs have caused the formerly large Christian communities in Basra and Baghdad to virtually disappear -- some of those families have fled to Ninewa, while others are going overseas. ADM representatives are urgently concerned that more Christian land will be expropriated, further diluting the limited power Christians now hold in Ninewa and elsewhere in Iraq. End Summary.

2005 VOTING RIGGED AGAINST CHRISTIANS

¶3. (C) When asked by Team Leader Knight to detail current ADM concerns, Zia compared Ninewa's Chaldo-Assyrian community to Native Americans and other indigenous minorities which struggle to maintain their cultures and control of their lands. As his first example, he emphasized that Ninewa's Provincial Council should include at least four ADM members given Ninewa's Christian population. This level of representation was denied in Ninewa's 2005 provincial elections by Iraqi National Guard intimidation and ballot-box stuffing directed by Kurds. Zia added that Shabek and other minorities are not problems for Christians, since they too suffer from Arab and Kurd marginalization.

¶4. (C) Zia further accused the Independent Elections Commission of Iraq (IECI)-- then responsible for overseeing the election -- of bias in favor of Kurdish party lists. Given this

experience and the Sunni boycott of the 2005 election, the Provincial Council of Ninewa is now a Kurdish entity -- 31 of the 41 members represent Kurds. Zia asserted that vote-rigging targeting Christians was reported in a timely fashion to the USG, UN representatives, the IECI and the Iraqi Army, but ADM complaints were ignored.

15. (C) Zia is fearful that Kurd manipulation and intimidation will be repeated in upcoming provincial elections, and will further Christian marginalization in Ninewa. Nonetheless, Zia affirmed that ADM will continue its efforts to gain political representation in the province commensurate with the Christian share of Ninewa's population.

CHRISTIANS FROM BASRA AND BAGHDAD FLEEING TO NINEWA

16. (C) In response to PRT Leader's query for further details on Christian communities in Ninewa, Khowshaba observed that over 3,000 Christian families recently relocated to the Ninewa Plains to escape violence in southern Iraq (Reftel). He pointed out that Basra and Baghdad are being rapidly emptied of Christians, and some areas like Dora in Baghdad have been completely abandoned. Displaced Christian families now in Ninewa have been assisted by friends and relatives and by the Assyrian Aid Society, which distributed funds raised in the United States, Europe and Australia. No help has been offered or provided by the Ninewa Government.

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17. (C) Khowshaba pointed out that that many of the best-trained and educated Iraqi Christians are leaving Iraq for Europe or the U.S. This emigration further diminishes the political influence of Iraq's Christians.

MORE LAND SEIZURES EXPECTED

18. (C) When asked how Christian displacement has been accomplished, Zia recounted expropriation of Christian land under Saddam. Under Law 117, traditionally Christian land in Ninewa was reallocated to Saddam supporters -- in 2001, 1230 parcels of Christian land in Qara Qosh were given to Sunni Arabs. Only 60 of those parcels have yet been returned to Christian families.

19. (C) Zia pointed out that a new land-tenure law similar to Saddam's Law 117 has been adopted by the GOI, to be administered by the Ministry of Municipalities. Zia fears this new law will be used to displace still more Christians. He believes Ninewa's Provincial Council will do nothing to end seizures of Christian land, since they favor Kurds and Arabs who control the provincial government.

COMMENT

110. (C) ADM leadership clearly believes Chaldo-Assyrians remain oppressed by Arabs and Kurds, and believes that Ninewa's provincial government does not now protect their interests. However, Zia's portrayal of Christians as one group among other minorities in Ninewa -- and implicitly their political partners -- suggests encouraging maturity

in the ADM and other minority political groups.

¶11. (C) Comment continued. If Khowshaba's numbers for Christian IDPs are correct -- and are in addition to the 2300-plus total of IDP families currently reported by the Provincial Council's Committee for Displacement and Migration and Ninewa's Red Crescent -- the total number of IDPs in Ninewa may reach 5,500 families (perhaps 21,000 individuals). However, like most of the Sunni IDPs in Ninewa, Christian IDPs have been supported by informal family and community networks rather than formal IDP assistance. It remains to be seen whether this influx will contribute to enhanced numbers of Christian voters when new provincial elections take place in 2007. End comment.
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